

North Country Public Radio Online

Connie Meng Review: aired Friday, January 25, 2002 on North Country Public Radio

Waiting for Godot

WAITING FOR GODOT is being given its first professional production in over a decade by Vermont Stage Company, and a nifty production it is. A major classic of the 20th century, this absurdist tale of two men waiting at the side of the road for a man named Godot is a story of hope deceived and deferred, but never extinguished.

An examination of the nature of existence through the characters of two vaudevillian clowns, the play has kept scholars, philosophers and critics arguing about its meaning since it was written in the early 50's. It's appropriate that in Act II when Estragon and Vladimir decide to entertain themselves by abusing each other verbally, the ultimate insults are curate, cretin and critic.

Mark Evancho's monochromatic set which cleverly includes the audience, (I'm not going to explain - it should be a surprise), and abstract tree provides a perfect backdrop for the actors. Mr. Evancho's rather harsh lighting highlights the coldness of their existence. Costume designer Angela Brande has dressed Pozzo - by the way, I liked his spats - and especially Lucky in colors which provide a startling contrast to the black and white garb of Estragon and Vladimir.

As I've come to expect from Vermont Stage, the play is well cast. Young Avery Croft does a nice job as the Boy, with a subtle difference between Acts I and II. Kathryn Blume does a terrific job as Lucky, especially in her long speech. The decision to put a woman in the role adds a whole new dimension to the relationship, when one considers it's sadistic nature and Lucky's ability to think.

John D. Alexander is both frightening and pitiable as Pozzo. As Estragon says, "He's all humanity." His exit speech is very powerful and contains what is probably the play's best-known line, "They give birth astride of a grave...".

Steven Hauck as Estragon and Andrew Sellon as Vladimir play really well together. They're a good contrast both physically and emotionally. Their gymnastics and hat manipulations are great fun. Mr. Hauck displays the naivete and curiosity of a child. He has one of my favorite lines, "Don't let's do anything. It's safer." Mr. Sellon's Vladimir alternates between having the strength to support Estragon and a terrible fear and vulnerability. During his long speech near the end of the play he shows us the true face of despair. As he says, "...habit is a great deadener." But there's still hope as the two continue to wait.

Director Mark Nash has done a fine job with this complex play. He's not afraid of pauses, particularly in the Act I Pozzo scene, which allow us the time to take in reactions. The slow motion with Lucky's rope and Vladimir's decision to stomp on Lucky's thinking hat are wonderful touches. His staging in the round is exceptionally good; there is no good or bad side.

I enjoyed looking at the audience opposite me. Everyone was totally absorbed and gently smiling, as if they thoroughly understood the play. As my friend said, it means different things to different people. This Godot was worth waiting for. If you've never seen the play, this production is a good one to start with. On a scale of one to five, the Vermont Stage Company's production of WAITING FOR GODOT gets four and three-fourths ferry boats. For North Country Public Radio I'm Connie Meng.